

**HUMAN SERVICES PROGRAM QUALITY REVIEW
CHARLESTON COUNTY DSS
OCTOBER 2001/ APRIL 2002**

At the request of the Charleston County DSS Director, the South Carolina Department of Social Services Human Services Division conducted a qualitative review of Charleston County DSS in Fall 2001.

The review was conducted on site, and consisted of case record reviews, staff interviews, client contacts, and external stakeholder interviews. In this review, the external stakeholders interviewed were foster parents, Mental Health, Department of Juvenile Justice, the Guardian ad litem, Foster Care Review Board, and a Family Court Judge. We also were provided the Charleston County DSS outcome measures and performance analysis document developed in June 2001.

It must be noted that the review which generated the findings in this section was conducted in October 2001 and sampled case activity from January through August 2001. Since that time, the Agency has implemented a new computer system (CAPSS), and the County has developed several local protocols which address many of the issues noted in this report.

In April 2002, the Human Services Division conducted a supplemental qualitative review of the Dual Track Pilot activities at Charleston DSS. This review was also conducted on site, and consisted of systems and case record reviews, staff interviews, client contacts, and external stakeholder interviews.

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DEMOGRAPHIC AND SAMPLE INFORMATION**

Program under review	Dual Track Pilot	Referrals Not Accepted As CPS Reports	CPS Assess.	CPS Treat. - Active	CPS Treat. - Closed	Foster Care - Active	Foster Care - Closed	Foster Home License
Period Under Review	2/28/02	6/01/01 through 8/31/01	4/01/01 through 6/30/01	8/31/01	6/01/01 through 8/31/01	8/31/01	6/01/01 through 8/31/01	8/31/01
Case Pop. for Period Under Review	87	65	209	409	67	265	35	68
Cases Sampled	12	20	20	20	20	20	20	20
Cases Provided by County	4							
Cases Reviewed	16	20	20	19	20	19	19	19

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DUAL TRACK PILOT PROJECT EVALUATION

Charleston DSS implemented the Dual Track procedures in January 1999 in one unit composed of a supervisor and 4 to 6 staff. The pilot has been conducted in 2 school districts in Charleston County - #10 (Downtown Charleston), and #20 (West of the Ashley River). All referrals for Charleston DSS are sent to a separate Intake unit which makes the decision to accept or not accept the referral as a CPS report or a Dual Track assessment case.

DUAL TRACK GENERAL FINDINGS

The findings below affect the quality of the casework and service delivery either directly or indirectly. They are based on staff interviews, stakeholder interviews, client interviews, case records, and computer system review.

STRENGTHS:

1. Charleston DSS management staff have developed a system of meetings and briefings to ensure regular opportunities for discussion of case situations, supervisory input and guidance, and mutual decision making.
2. Meaningful supervision and guidance is apparent throughout the Dual Track casework process at all critical decision points, particularly in case decision making, planning, and evaluation of progress.
3. Charleston DSS is responsive in initiating assessments quickly.
4. Parents and/or appropriate caregivers were directly involved in the development of their case plan and the implementation of service activities.
5. The initiation of services after placement or case decision generally was immediate and decreased the time of agency involvement.

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6. Direct contacts with clients were frequent and the activities which occurred were well-documented. When caseworkers were interviewed and asked about specific cases, they were able to describe in detail ongoing activities and how those actions applied to the needs of the family. Staff work after normal working hours to provide services and to complete documentation.
7. In general, stakeholders viewed the Agency as effective in working with their respective offices. Closures were planned with service providers and clients.
8. In general, cases were assessed primarily from the perspective of changes in circumstances, with a lesser emphasis on change in behavior.

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MEASURES AND OUTPUTS**

Outcome 1: Increase permanency for children in Foster Care (Safe and Stable Home for Every Child)

Measure	Source	County		State	
		#	%	#	%
Total Children in Care	SACWIS	395	100%	4862	100%
Children in care more than 12 months	SACWIS	255	64.56%	3052	62.77%
In care more than 12 months where permanency hearing has not been held	SACWIS	140	54.90%	1044	34.21%
Children in care for whom permanency plan has not been achieved within 3/6 months after permanency planning hearing	SACWIS	Report under development			

Summary: While data is not readily available concerning the achievement of permanency plans, the lack of involvement of the family or the child in planning, and a superficial evaluation of case progress are major factors in this outcome. The frequent judicial reviews and consent orders which occur raise questions about the permanency hearing not held numbers. We noted documentation problems and delays in updating the computer system which may account for this discrepancy.

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Outcome 2: Reduce Time in Foster Care to Adoption

Measure	County		State	
	#	Months	#	Months
Average number of months in foster care until adoption is final	2	79.77	469	46.40
Average number of days/months in foster care after permanency planning hearing approves a plan of TPR or adoption for the child	Report under development			
Average number of days/months in foster care after TPR is granted	Report under development			

Summary: Delays in systems updates make this figure questionable.

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Outcome 3: Improve Child Well-Being

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of children and adolescents attending school and performing: passing grades, maintaining grade level, school readiness (1 st), truancy, suspensions/expulsions, literacy, diploma/GED, secondary education	In the 15 cases reviewed where Foster Children were in school, we found that all were on grade level, and 9 cases (60%) were attending school and exhibiting no attendance or behavior problems. The 6 cases with attendance or behavior problems were receiving support services.			
Number and percentage of children and adolescents who show physical and mental health is stable or improving (therapy, screenings)	In the 19 cases reviewed, we found that the 9 children identified with mental health or adjustment issues were actively receiving therapy or counseling.			
Number and percentage of children with substance abuse are stable or improving	In the 19 cases reviewed, we found that no children were identified with substance abuse issues.			
Number and percentage of runaways	8	2.03%	95	1.95%
Number and percentage who age out of foster care and failed to meet goals	Report under development			
Number and percentage who become pregnant	From case file review and caseworker interviews, we noted no instances of pregnancy or of a foster child fathering a child.			
Number and percentage who are adjudicated for delinquency: once, more than once.	In the 15 cases reviewed, we found that 3(20%) children were involved with delinquency issues.			

Summary: Based on case reviews, children in foster care in Charleston are generally experiencing few problems with school, behavior, or substance abuse. The Independent Living cases reviewed documented realistic case plans to prepare the child for leaving foster care.

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Outcome 4: Reduce Time in Foster Care to Reunification Without Increasing Re-entry

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of children who show physical and mental health stability and/or improvement	Based on our review of 19 Foster Care cases and caseworker interviews, all children were either receiving counseling or in a supportive placement which stabilized any physical or mental health conditions.			
Number and percentage of parents with substance abuse who are stable and/or improving	Report under development			
Average number of family/relative visits per child per month (parents, other relatives)	In the 7 Foster Care cases where visitation was a part of the case plan, we noted an average of 1 visit per child per month from family or relatives.			
Number of children who return to foster care after reunification within 12 months	10	6.62%	201	8.72%

Summary: Our case review indicated that visitation occurred on a regular and planned basis. In those instances where visitation did not occur as planned, there was documented followup with the parent or relative to address the need for visitation or reasons for not attending.

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Outcome 5: Reduce Placements of Young Children in Group Homes or Institutions (Federal Requirements)

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Percentage of children age 12 years and below placed in group homes or institutions	19	6.99%	272	100%

Summary: Charleston DSS is taking the age of the child into consideration when arranging placements, by considering the availability of individual foster homes first. The lack of available spaces in individual foster homes occasionally precludes placement of siblings together unless in a group home or institution.

Outcome 6: Reduce/Prevent Abuse of Children in Foster Care

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number of children in foster care with substantiated or indicated maltreatment by a foster parent or facility staff person	6	6.12%	98	100%

Summary: Charleston DSS has regular telephone and face-to-face contacts with foster parents by foster home licensing staff. Not all foster parents are seen at these contacts, and the topics discussed are not clearly documented. The visits with foster children are also not clearly documenting an ongoing assessment of the child's safety.

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Outcome 7: Increase Stability of Placements and Other Aspects of Foster Children's Lives

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Percentage of children in foster care with more than two placements	196	49.62%	2690	55.53%

Summary: The majority of cases we reviewed had between 1 and 3 placements. In those cases with higher numbers of placements, the reason for changing placements was not generally documented clearly in the record.

Outcome 8: Increase Stability of Children's Lives

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Percentage of children who change schools/school systems:	Of the 12 children in Foster Care who are attending school:			
Once	6 (50.00%) had changed school once as the result of placement			
More than once	6(50.00%) had changed school more than once as the result of placements.			
Percentage of cases with more than one change in foster care case workers	Of the 19 cases reviewed, 15 (78.95%) had more than one change in foster care caseworkers.			

Summary: The documentation in the files reviewed did not directly address changes in schools or school districts, but review staff were able to determine from dictation those changes in schools that were recorded. All cases reviewed had more than one change in caseworkers.

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Outcome 9: Reduce/Prevent Abuse and Neglect of Children

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of indicated cases of child abuse and/or neglect:	38	53.00%	538	36.00%
Total				
Among high-risk populations	Report under development			
Number of fatalities among children known to the agency	Reported Elsewhere			

Summary: Charleston DSS has regular staffing procedures in place to address effective case decision-making. In actual practice, case decisions are usually based on limited contact with the family. As stated before, an ongoing assessment of child safety in active CPS and Foster Care cases is not clearly documented or enforced.

Outcome 10: Reduce/Prevent Recurrence of Child Abuse and Neglect

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of cases of children with 2 nd indicated report within 12 months of the 1 st indicated report	Report under development			
Number and percentage of cases of children with 2 nd indicated report within 12 months of reunification	Report under development			

Summary: We noted that most cases reviewed did not have prior CPS history, either of unfounded reports, active agency involvement, or not accepted at referral. The general finding of limited contacts with families, particular CPS Treatment cases, limited client involvement in case planning, and limited supervisory involvement are significant factors in this outcome.

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**Outcome 11: Limit the Number of Abused and/or Neglected Children
Entering Foster Care to Those Who are Truly Endangered in
Their Home**

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of children court ordered into placement	107	27.09%	1131	23.26%
Number and percentage of children placed informally (with relatives)	12	3.04%	269	5.53%
Number and percentage of treatment cases closed with risk reduced and treatment goals achieved (i.e. parents' and children's physical/mental health and safety improved)	22	4.79%	360	7.24%

Summary: The limited involvement of clients and service providers in the closure decision, especially with CPS Treatment, calls into question the validity of the number above.

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Outcome 12: Minimize Intrusion upon the Lives of Families and Children

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of children and families, when asked, indicate/feel that the agency intruded in their lives:	In the client interviews conducted, all interviewees felt the involvement of the agency was an intrusion into their lives.			
Where services are provided (community based)	Interviews and case record reviews indicated the provision of services in the community and as near to the client as available.			
How we deliver services (mutual planning)	In client interviews and in case record reviews, mutual planning was not occurring.			
When services are provided (convenient hours)	Most interviews reported that it was possible to arrange convenient times for service to be provided.			
How clients were treated (respect and dignity)	Clients interviewed reported that they were not involved in planning, but were told what to do.			
Number of days/weeks from achievement of treatment goals to case closure in treatment cases	Report under development			

Summary: While there are regular staffings with other agencies, the exchange of progress reports was not clearly documented. The limited involvement of clients and service providers in case planning and evaluation of case plans in terms of activities instead of behavioral change are barriers to the achievement of this outcome.

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Outcome 13: Increase Supply of Foster Home Placement Slots

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number of licensed foster home placement slots	121	100%	1695	100%
Kinship care	Report under development			
Placements that fit	Report under development			
Close to home	Report under development			

Summary: Charleston DSS has procedures in place to improve support to foster parents and to determine appropriate placements for children.

Outcome 14: Increase Number of Adoptions

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number of adoptions finalized	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Summary: Not Reviewed (Separate Organization)

Outcome 15: Reduce Number of Disrupted Adoptions

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number of adoptions disrupted within 12 months of finalization	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Summary: Not Reviewed (Separate Organization)